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ABSTRACT

The theoretical relationships between employee job satisfaction and employee behavior, and the factors that influence job satisfaction among nurses are considered, along with the type of research that should be conducted on this topic. Although major contributions to the theory of human needs have been made by Maslow and by Herzberg, the relationship between job satisfaction and behavior remains ambiguous. This may be due in part to the lack of specificity of the theoretical models used to investigate these relationships. Attempts to clarify the relationship among motivation, job satisfaction, and productivity are confounded by inconsistencies in research findings. Despite the contrasting points of view, the research in the field supports the perspective that satisfaction and performance are related. They suggest that a low, but consistent relationship exists. Research suggests that a large number of variables are thought to be related to nursing job satisfaction, including shift work, relationship with supervisor, and opportunities to advance and attain ambitions. It is suggested that the variety of perceptions held by nurses as to what constitutes job satisfaction and the complex ways in which these perceptions are formed are among the most salient problems impeding research advancement in this area. The notable absence of longitudinal and replication studies represents one set of problems with job satisfaction research. Additionally, the use of more sophisticated statistical analysis, such as path analysis and/or discriminate analysis, is suggested. Although these techniques presuppose rather large sample sizes, microapproaches to the study of this subject should not be discouraged. Future research should be characterized by more rigor and repetition and focused on verifying extant theories. (SW)

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NURSING JOB SATISFACTION: THREE BASIC QUESTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The study of job satisfaction among nurses has not been very fruitfull. Much of the research on job satisfaction per se has taken place in non-health related settings, that which has focussed on nursing has not been conclusive nor reliable.

Valid and effective management techniques cannot be advanced within a theoretical framework beset with contradictions. More consistent research findings, better clarification of the interactive nature of the job satisfaction concept among nurses, and more sophisticated methodological approaches must be employed if we are going to meaningfully advance. This area of research can contribute to the improvement of management practices among nurses.

Although the theoretical foundations for the study of job satisfaction among employees have changed little since the work of Maslow, the research on the subject has been voluminous. Unfortunately, job satisfaction research studies have not proved to be very helpful to the field of nursing. Perhaps this has been a function of their highly opinionated nature or because many have taken place in private businesses or industrial settings as opposed to non-profit related institutions where the bulk of nurses are apt to be found. Whatever the case may be, it is evident that more research is needed but certainly not more of the same.

Three questions are posed and addressed in this paper in order to underscore the need for better research efforts in relation to the study of job satisfaction in nursing. First, "What are the theoretical relationships between employee job satisfaction and employee behavior?" Second, "What factors influence job satisfaction among nurses?" Third, "What should be the nature of future research on this topic?"

Theoretical Relationships

It is generally accepted that satisfied employees tend to be the most reliable and productive employees. But it is not always clear what factors contribute to employee satisfaction, especially in the field of nursing as we shall see. Factors studied the most in this regard are usually derived from a "needs satisfaction" framework. Needs are the requirements one must have satisfied for his/her comfort and well being (Benton and White, 1972). The perception is that when an employee's needs are satisfied the most positive employee behavior is likely to result. These behaviors may take the form of higher productivity levels, less absenteeism, and minimum job turnover rates. Theoretically, of course, the reverse follows when the needs are not or are

inadequately met.

Two major contributors to the theory of human needs are Maslow and Herzberg. Their theories overlap to the extent the Hersberg acknowledges and builds upon the work of Maslow. Maslow's major contribution is represented by his needs heirarchy which ranges from the lowest and most basic -- (1) physiological, through (2) safety, (3) social, and (4) esteem -- to the highest and most fulfilling, (5) self-actualization. He postulated that individuals are driven by the need to satisfy these needs and that once one need level is satisfied the individual moves to the next level. While lower order needs are ordinarily satisfied in contemporary society upper order needs are rarely fulfilled. They have, however, been found to be positively correlated with job performance (Porter and Lawler 1976).

Herzberg (1971) viewed the phenomenon of motivation and its relationship to morale and satisfaction and dissatisfaction with one's job from a different but supportive perspective to that projected by Maslow. While Maslow focussed on "needs," Herzberg proposes a set of "factors" identified as motivators and hygiene. Further, motivators are defined as factors inherent in the work situation which are satisfying. Theoretically, an increase in motivators is associated with increased productivity. Examples of motivators are achievement, recognition, the work itself, advancement, growth and responsibility. On the other hand, hygiene factors are found outside the work itself, and are related to dissatisfaction. These are identified as interpersonal relationships, working conditions, salary, status, security, supervision and company policy.

The specific connection between Herzberg and Maslow is highlighted by Herzberg's suggestion that attitudes of workers are closely related to their needs (Maslow) and that motivators are associated with a system of human needs.

A compelling point made by the Herzberg theory is that the presence or absence of either motivator factors or hygiene factors does not influence the other and necessarily lead to dissatisfaction. (White and Maguire, 1973).

The relationship between job satisfaction and behavior remains ambiguous despite the impact of the theoretical contributions of Maslow and Herzberg in this area of research. This may be due in part to the lack of specificity of the theoretical models used to investigate these relationships. For example, Watkin (1974) views the theories of Maslow and Herzberg as too general for explaining the complex nature of human behavior involved in various management-employee situations. According to Watkins, the ability to identify and respond to individual differences among employees is the greatest requirement of managers -- not the identification with broad theories.

Attempts to clarify the relationship between motivation, job satisfaction and productivity are confounded by inconsistencies in research findings. For example, some investigators (Anstey, 1975; Vonder, 1971) tend to support the view that motivation and satisfaction are closely related to the productivity, but Kuhn, Slocum, and Chase (1971) raise considerable doubt about this hypothesis. And although Herzberg supports the "close relationship" hypothesis relevant to these variables, Kuhn, Slocum, and Chase (1971) note that his conclusion was based on a review of twenty-six studies of which only fourteen revealed a positive relationship.

The skepticism of Kuhn and others is further buttressed by Porter and Lawler (1969). They developed a model which contradicts the old assumption that satisfaction influences performance. Porter and Lawler suggest that satisfaction is a function of effective performance, not the reverse. Performance leads to rewards which may result in satisfaction. An employee's satisfaction is a result of the size and frequency of his rewards as well as his expectation of the reward.

Their model identified two types of rewards, extrinsic (same as Maslow's lower order needs and Herzberg's hygiene factors) and intrinsic (same as Maslow's higher order needs and Herzberg's motivator factors). Neither of these reward types is expected to lead directly to satisfaction, because, each is influenced by a third factor, an expectation of reward. This expectation factor is related to the amount of reward an employee perceives to be due him as a function of his job performance.

Despite these contrasting points of view, the prevailing research findings support the perspective that satisfaction and performance are related. They suggest that a low, but consistent relationship exists. It is this association between job satisfaction and performance as well as the strong association of job satisfaction with employee turnover which forms the basis for the widely held perception of the importance of job satisfaction (Longest, 1974).

Factors Influencing Job Satisfaction Among Nurses

Another way of viewing the relationship between job satisfaction and performance is to observe the effects upon performance when job satisfaction is lacking. Employee turnover in health care systems is one of the most costly and disruptive problems which results when job dissatisfaction occurs (Brief, 1976).

Several studies have explored the relationship between employee turnover and the causes of job dissatisfaction among nurses. According to Strilaeff (1976) erratic shift is a prime contributor to turnover as well as salary, family responsibilities, and dissatisfaction with the work itself. Axne, Boniger, and Dodson (1976) found poor interpersonal relationships, especially those between nurses and their supervisors, to be a common cause of termination among nurses. Finally, McCloskey (1974) found nurses very concerned about the quality of the supervision they received. He learned that many of them would not have

resigned their positions had they been given more recognition for work done, had they been allowed greater work schedule flexibility, and had their supervision been more agreeable.

Additional views of the controversy related to job satisfaction among nurses can be gleaned from other studies. Perhaps the earliest investigation of nursing satisfaction was undertaken by Nahm (1949). Her list of factors which reportedly differentiates satisfied from dissatisfied nurses was prophetic at the time. Many subsequent studies have cited one or more of her factors. Factors identified by Nahm were (1) interest in the work, (2) general adjustment of the individual, (3) relationships with superior officers, (4) family and social relationships, (5) hours of work, (6) income, and (7) opportunities to advance and attain ambitions. These factors were generally supported by Pickens and Tayback (1957) and by a host of studies reviewed by Johnston (1976). They are also encompassed within the theoretical frameworks of Maslow and Herzberg.

Interestingly, in contrast to these studies which imply that employee turnover among nurses is an undersirable characteristic which needs to be controlled, Porter and Steers (1973) question whether attempts to completely control it are wise. They note that the terminating employee may secure a more personally satisfying position and the organization may be able to replace a less effective person with a more competent one.

A large number of variables are obviously thought to be related to nursing job satisfaction. It is precisley this that makes the study of it a very complex and difficult venture. Specifically, job satisfaction among nurses is not conducive to accurate and reliable measurement. The variety of perceptions held by nurses as to what constitutes job satisfaction and the complex ways in

which these perceptions are formed are clearly among the most salient problems impending research advancement in this area. For example, these perceptions may be shaped by the nature of interpersonal relationships between nurses and their co-workers (Everly and Falcione, 1976), the sex of the nurse (Pablo, 1976), and the nature of the match between the working climate and the personality of the nurse (MacDonald, 1976)

Future Research

Job satisfaction among nurses has been addressed many times from many points of view. Consequently, one would normally expect to find more conclusive results than we have found. What then are some of the major problems related to the study of this subject?

The notable absence of longitudinal and replication studies represent one set of problems with job satisfaction research. The use of these strategies would help to screen out concepts which may appear to be logically applicable but are empirically innocuous.

Second, given the multitude of variables which are suggested to be related to job satisfaction among nurses, it is doubtful that any significant progress will be made regarding the clarification of the interactive nature of this concept without the use of more sophisticated statistical analysis such as path analysis and/or discriminate analysis techniques.

Although these techniques presuppose rather large sample sizes, micro-approaches to the study of this subject should not be discouraged. Indeed, the use of anthropological paradigms in health care settings could be very fruitful. For example, the in-depth focus on a particular variable: job satisfaction and the recording of the ways in which it affects and is affected

by other environmental phenomena such as organization structure, interpersonal relationships, reward practices, and performance expectations may also serve to better enable us to understand job satisfaction among nurses.

In summary, future research should be characterized by more rigor and repetition and focused on verifying extant theories first. We simply must weed out the unproductive from the productive. Valid and effective nursing management techniques cannot be advanced within a theoretical framework which is beset with contradictions.

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